NNSA NEWS
National Nuclear Security Administration
U.S. Department of Energy
For Immediate Release
December 1, 2006
Contact: NNSA Public Affairs, (202) 586-7371

Nuclear Weapons Officials Agree to Pursue RRW Strategy

Reliable Replacement Warhead will enable long-term confidence in a smaller, safer, more secure nuclear weapons stockpile, without underground nuclear testing

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Senior officials at the Department of Defense and the Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) today said they have determined that the Reliable Replacement Warhead (RRW) is feasible as a strategy for sustaining the nation's nuclear weapons stockpile for the long-term without underground nuclear testing.

"The Reliable Replacement Warhead will provide means to ensure the long-term reliability of the stockpile and enable us to establish a safer and more secure nuclear deterrent," said NNSA Administrator Linton Brooks. "It will give us the tools we need to build on the President's vision of maintaining the smallest nuclear stockpile that is consistent with national security requirements."

The Nuclear Weapons Council (NWC), a working group of senior officials from the Defense Department and NNSA that oversees nuclear weapons policy, made the decision after reviewing competing designs for a replacement nuclear warhead for the nation's sea-based nuclear deterrent. They were submitted by the nation's two nuclear weapons design laboratories, Los Alamos National Laboratory and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory.

The NWC launched the competition more than a year ago to determine whether a replacement warhead could enable long-term confidence in the performance of the current stockpile without a return to underground nuclear testing. The program has been authorized by Congress, although no decisions to build or deploy the warhead have been made.

The council is continuing to discuss the two laboratory submissions and has not selected a preferred design. Once the NWC reaches a decision, expected in the next few weeks, the two departments will conduct a study to further define and develop detailed cost estimates for the RRW program. A move to the engineering development and production engineering phase will require congressional approval.

The NWC is chaired by Kenneth Krieg, undersecretary of defense for acquisition, technology and logistics. Other members are Ambassador Linton Brooks, undersecretary of energy for nuclear security and administrator of the National Nuclear Security Administration, Admiral Edmund Giambastiani, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Ambassador Eric Edelman, undersecretary of defense for policy, and General James Cartwright, commander of the U.S. Strategic Command.

Fast Facts:

The RRW will:

* Assure long-term confidence in the reliability of the nuclear weapons stockpile;

1 Enhance the security of nuclear weapons, through the use of state of the art technology to prevent unauthorized use by terrorists, rogue nations or criminal organizations;
2 Improve the safety of the stockpile, through upgrades such as the use of insensitive high explosives, rather than conventional high explosives;
3 Help to develop a more responsive nuclear weapons infrastructure by:
* Using replacement components and assemblies that are easier to manufacture and maintain;
1 Exercising critical nuclear weapons design and production skills; Enabling a reduced stockpile size, by increasing confidence in the infrastructure to produce weapons if and when they are needed;
* Decrease the likelihood that a nuclear test will be needed to confirm weapon performance.

Established by Congress in 2000, NNSA is a semi-autonomous agency within the U.S. Department of Energy responsible for enhancing national security through the military application of nuclear science. NNSA maintains and enhances the safety, security, reliability and performance of the U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile without nuclear testing; works to reduce global danger from weapons of mass destruction; provides the U.S. Navy with safe and effective nuclear propulsion; and responds to nuclear and radiological emergencies in the U.S. and abroad. Visit www.nnsa.doe.gov for more information.

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